

[0025] To begin a game play in the first gaming mode, the method receives a wager activation on a player input device at the gaming machine at block 304, which typically consists of some input from the player to set the amount to be wagered from their credit amount on the machine. The wager amount may also be carried over from previous game rounds by simply starting the game with the previous wager amount set. This typically happens through a 'Play' button (110, FIG. 6) on the game cabinet or touchscreen display, and serves to place the wager and start a single round of game play in the base game at block 304. In embodiments having reels, reel displays, or simulated reels, this is conducted by spinning the reels. Other embodiments may otherwise rearrange or randomize the symbols on the matrix in any suitable manner. For games that use other methods of scrambling the matrix besides simulated reels, the random outcome is determined at this step as appropriate for the game. The preferred version generates at least one random number and uses the at least one random number to determine a prize amount and a set of game reel stops, which is fed to a first data structure for providing the game presentation. The base game outcome includes a possibility of winning money value credits and a possibility of winning a bonus game outcome. The game outcome is evaluated at block 306 by displaying an evaluation of the symbols on the matrix for winning patterns and other winning symbols or combinations thereof.

[0026] After each primary game round is completed, at block 308 the process checks to determine if a group mode activation has occurred. If no mode change has occurred, the process returns to block 304 and continues receiving wager activations and providing primary game results. In this embodiment, a group mode activation occurs when a group mode plugin service activates it, as described with respect to the process of FIG. 5. In other embodiments, other events may trigger a group mode activation.

[0027] If the group mode activation occurs, the process goes to block 310 where it begins operating a set of two or more of electronic gaming machines (EGM's) as a group in which the secondary display areas of the set of gaming machines include a common, persistent game board with a plurality of prize objects. Data structures for displaying and performing the second gaming mode are activated for all gaming machines in the set. The set of gaming machines is typically part of a group or "bank" of adjacent machines on the casino floor, arranged side by side or in a circle. To begin the group mode at block 310, each gaming machine in the set displays a graphic sequence including the appearance of prize objects 72 (FIG. 2A) on secondary display area 58, and a message 74 indicating that the player should wager to participate in the secondary bonus game, in this example a "Diamond Rush" theme in which wagers in the primary game during the group mode have the opportunity to "steal" a diamond from the group of diamond prize objects 72 presented at the secondary display areas of the machines.

[0028] Next at block 312, the process receives wager activations at the participating gaming machines, and provides a primary game outcome to the wagering machine for each wager activation having a chance to include a prize amount. It is noted that fulfilling wager activations for a set of machines is discussed, each machine typically has its own instantiation of game engine software running the depicted process to fulfill the functions of the gaming machine. Multiple machines are discussed merely to illustrate the

group mode, and are not typically all handled by the same executing software. At block 314, the outcomes are evaluated to determine if they qualify for a prize object award, presented at the secondary display area. In this embodiment, primary game results that qualify for a prize object award are those that would have qualified for a bonus prize or respin round during the ordinary base game mode. These outcomes have a higher associated credit prize than awards which only include a prize presented on the primary display area 104 (FIG. 2A). The larger prize is presented as an award of a prize object in the group gaming mode. In other embodiments, other events in the primary game may qualify for a prize object award.

[0029] If no prize object award is due at block 314, the process goes to block 316 where it conducts the primary game round in the primary display area 104 and presents any prizes due through winning outcomes on the matrix of symbol locations 51. Then the process returns to block 312 to await further wager activations.

[0030] If a prize object award is due to the primary game outcome at block 314, the process goes to block 318 where it performs a graphic sequence including the primary and secondary display areas and showing the award of a prize object from the group game board depicted at secondary display area 48. FIG. 2B shows state of the primary display area 104 and secondary display areas 58 after block 312 but before block 318. A primary game result is presented on the matrix of symbol locations 51. In this example the primary game result includes a symbol not available in the first gaming mode, a diamond symbol 74. Such unique symbols or animations may be added to the primary game presentation in the group gaming mode. In FIG. 2B, a primary game result is presented with a win of 30 credits due to the diamond symbol 30. However the primary game result in this example included a respin round with a 10,000 credit prize. Consequently, in the second game mode, instead of a respin, the game proceeds to display the award of a prize object 72 from the game board.

[0031] As shown in FIG. 2C, the award of a prize object at block 318 may include a graphic sequence in which non-awarded prize objects 73 are greyed out of otherwise deemphasized in the game board (only for the gaming machine receiving the award), and ending with the awarded prize object 72 emphasized as shown. Other embodiments may include other graphic sequences to depict the prize object 72 awarded, such as highlighting and animations of the awarded prize object 72. The credit amount depicted for the awarded prize object 72 is credited to the player. One or more prize objects may be awarded, which along with the primary game outcome displayed in the primary display area 104, add up to the prize amount due for a particular primary game outcome.

[0032] Next at block 320, the process performs a graphic sequence showing the prize object 72 being removed from game boards at the other gaming machines in the group. Preferably this sequence occurs simultaneously to the award of the prize object 72 at block 318. In this embodiment, the removal is accomplished by greying out the removed prize object 72 and adding a label on it indicating it has been "stolen" or otherwise taken by another player. This process tends to encourage wagering at a fast rate during the group gaming mode, because the prizes on the group game board appear to be "up for grabs" or available to the first player at the set of participating gaming machines to win them.